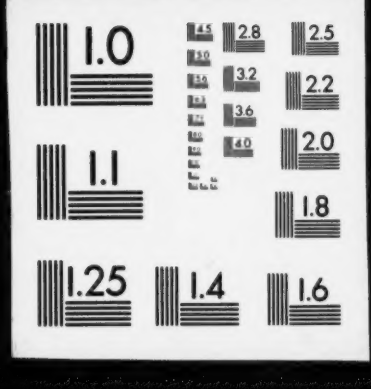
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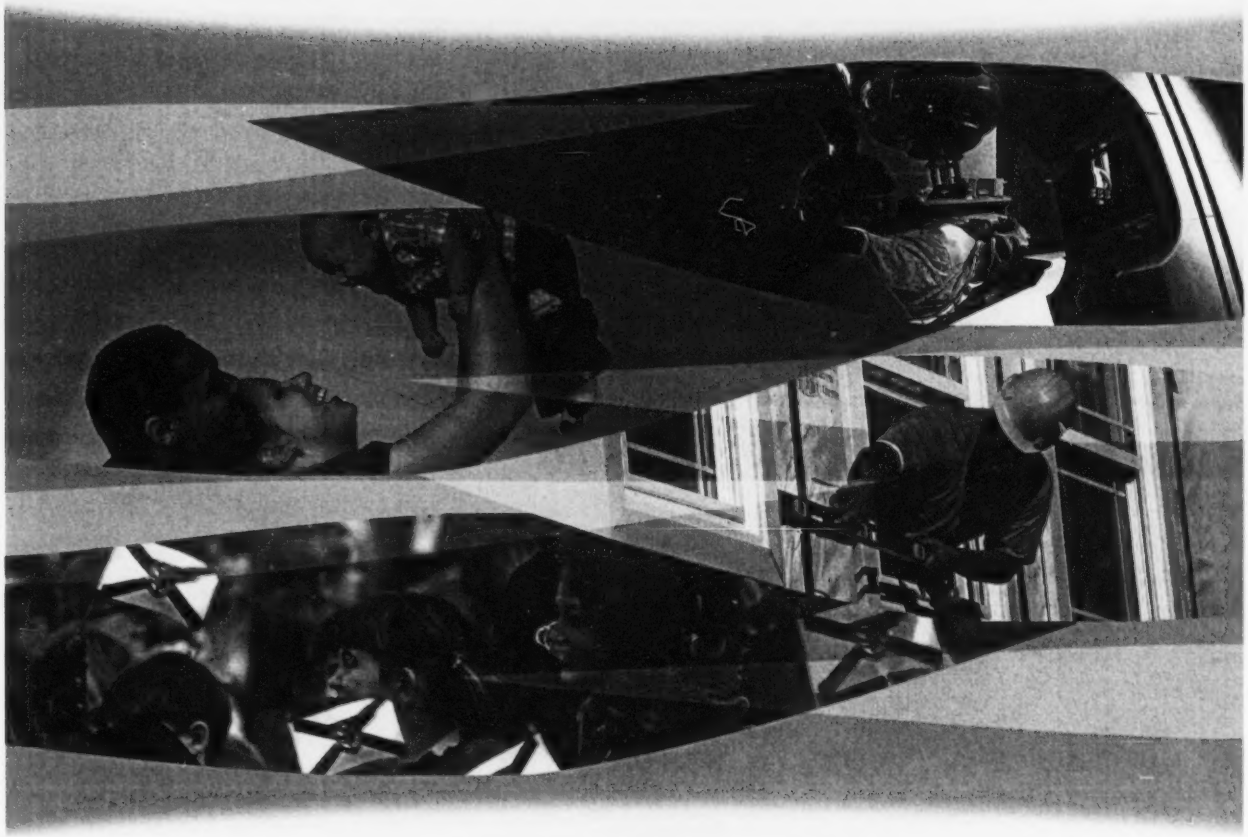
Making Life Better for You and Your Family

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2010

Her Honour
The Honourable Mayann E. Francis, O.N.S
Lieutenant Governor



NOVA SCOTIA

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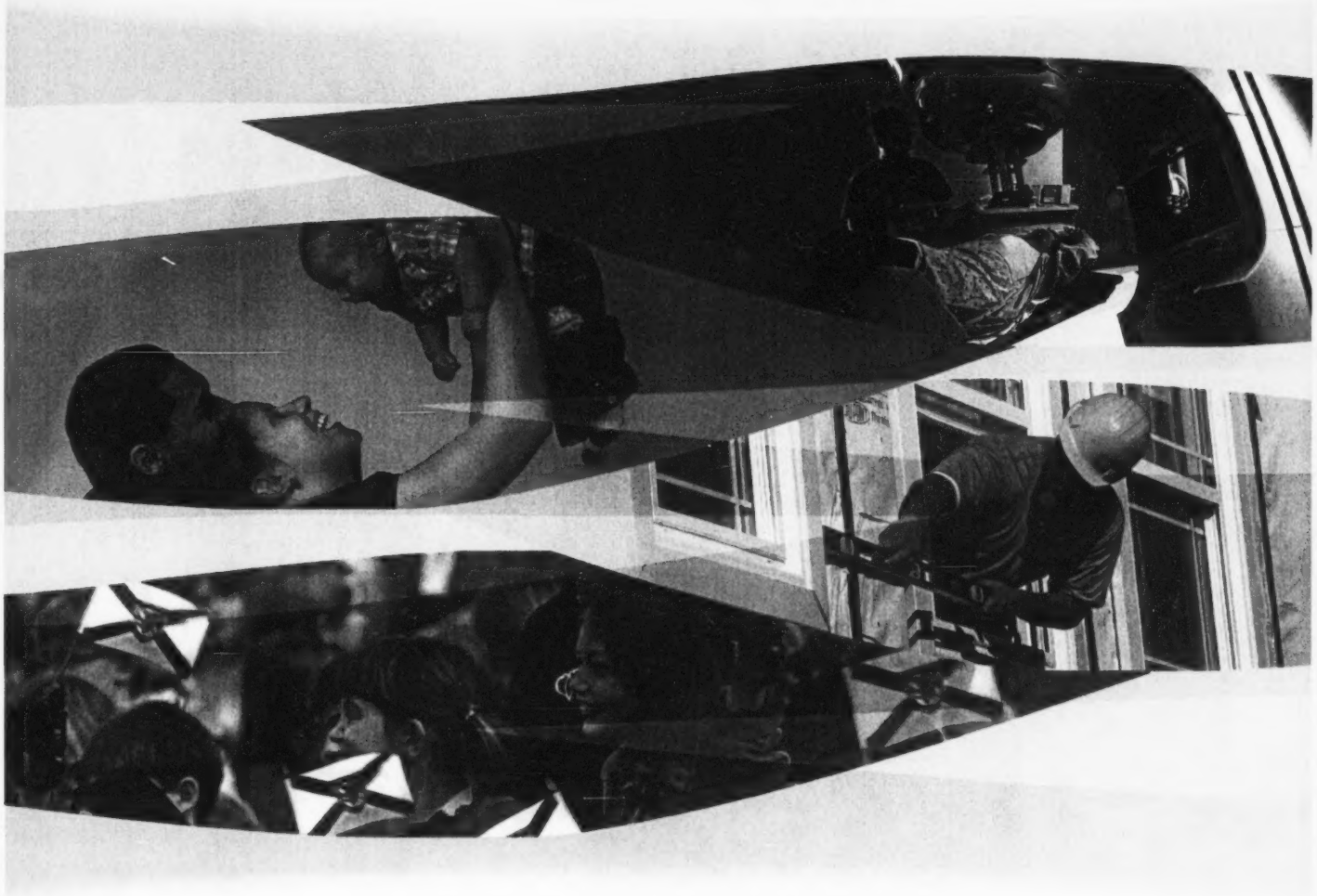

NOVA SCOTIA

Making Life Better for You and Your Family: Speech from the Throne 2010

NOVA SCOTIA

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, the people of Nova Scotia:

I am pleased to welcome you to the second session of the 61st General Assembly.

On this day, with the hope of spring in the air, our economy is growing again.

Our healthcare workers have shown us that we can weather a global pandemic.

Even when intolerance rears its ugly head, our society is still a place where morality and equality rule.

Our ability to rise to any challenge is a defining quality of the people of this province.

When Amherst's Willard Boyle shared the 2009 Nobel Prize for Physics, every Nova Scotian felt a touch of pride.

We felt the same way last month when Cole Harbour's Sidney Crosby scored one of the most famous goals in the history of this country.

With Canada's pride at stake, a hero rose. A Nova Scotian again came to the nation's aid in its moment of need.

When we look at Nova Scotia today, we see a province that treasures its past even as it takes pride in the accomplishments of its present.

A province that this year marks the 400th anniversary of the baptism of Grand Chief Membertou, which signaled the peaceful intentions between the Mi'kmaq and the nations of Europe.

A province that next year hosts the country's best young athletes during the 2011 Canada Games.

This summer, Nova Scotia will welcome Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second and The Duke of Edinburgh with warmth and enthusiasm, for a visit that celebrates service to country.

Nova Scotians are invited to take part in this year's Canadian Naval Centennial, celebrating this province's involvement with the Navy since its establishment and our pride in the modern Canadian Navy. During the Centennial year, my government will propose legislation to create an annual Cadet Day, and to further protect the civilian jobs of reservists.

Our rich naval history was recognized last month when Canada Post issued a stamp honouring Nova Scotia's remarkable William Hall. In 1857 Mr. Hall became the first Canadian sailor, the first Nova Scotian, and the first person of African descent to win the Victoria Cross.

Today we also remember former legislators who served this province with pride: Joe Casey, former Deputy Speaker and Member of the Legislature for Digby and Digby Annapolis; Charles MacArthur, former MLA for Inverness; and Garnet Brown, former Cabinet Member and MLA for Halifax–Eastern Shore.

We also remember three exceptional women who devoted their lives to their families and communities: Mrs. Theresa McNeil and Mrs. Edith Cromwell, who are recipients of the Order of Nova Scotia, and Willena Jones, who was one of the six Leading Ladies honoured this year for African Heritage Month.

And we pause to honour and thank Sergeant Kirk Taylor, a Nova Scotian solider killed in the line of duty in Afghanistan.

Nova Scotia is a forward-looking province.

A province with ambition.

A province with the talent and the drive to make the 21st Century its own.

Attaining dreams takes hard work. Seizing the future takes determination.

Sometimes, difficult choices must be made now to ensure a better future later.

Today we stand at a crossroads.

For too long provincial governments have simply reacted to events. They allowed short-term expedience to trump long-term vision.

Now it is time for a new trajectory.

My government's vision is clear: to help Nova Scotia retake control of its destiny.

To stop settling for less.

To get this province back on track.

For this is a government that cares deeply and has the resolve required to get the hard work done.

A government that will act wisely and decisively to make life better for Nova Scotians—while always remembering that decisions made today will impact future generations of Nova Scotians.

The provincial debt continues to rise. It now stands at the second highest, per capita, among the provinces. And our resource revenues are declining.

This path is unsustainable.

The heavier our financial burden grows, the more it threatens government's ability to deliver vital public services like health care and education.

My government inherited this situation. To do nothing is not an option.

The challenge is undeniable: tough decisions must be made today if Nova Scotia is to seize the moment and re-shape its future.

The people of this province elected a government that would make the right decisions for Nova Scotia's families.

And that is what we intend to do.

Earlier this week my government finished the most extensive budget consultation process in this province's history.

NOVA SCOTIA

Finance Minister Graham Steele and his staff held 24 meetings to hear directly from Nova Scotians about how to deal with the serious fiscal challenges we face.

Make no mistake, the 2010 budget will be fair. It will make the right decisions, because government's job is to find the right balance of priorities, values, programs, and services.

My government is demonstrating genuine leadership.

It is taking on the hard work to get our finances back to balance.

It is making life better for families in every region.

Our four-year plan has four key components.

First, my government will bring better health care to you and your family.

Second, we will create good jobs and grow the economy.

Third, we will make life more affordable.

Fourth, we will get Nova Scotia back to balance and ensure that government lives within its means.

Acting wisely and making the right decisions now will lay the foundation for lasting prosperity.

It begins with health care.

Better health care for you and your family

Wait times are too long, emergency rooms too crowded, and for too long, governments have made health care decisions without a clear focus on Nova Scotia patients. This must change.

This year, a new Quality Initiative will be developed to promote and improve patient safety and health-service quality across the province. A health system that puts quality and patient safety first is better managed, is more attractive to health care providers, and will better serve Nova Scotians.

Emergency Room access is a long-standing issue. It cannot be fixed overnight. But we are already making headway.

Last September, Doctor John Ross was appointed as the province's first-ever Advisor on Emergency Care. He will present his initial report in the near future.

Dr. Ross' report will help form the basis of the government's plan to ensure that families have access to the emergency care they need, when they need it. The Emergency Department Protection Fund will be used to fund specific initiatives in the plan.

In the meantime, government, district health authorities, and local communities are talking about how to resolve chronic ER closures.

Later this spring, the Minister of Health will table the first annual report examining the problem of chronic ER closures, so that Nova Scotians can make informed decisions.

My government will follow through on the commitment to relieve stress on the emergency system by opening new acute-care beds in Capital Health. The establishment of a Rapid Assessment Unit will help patients move faster through the ER to admission. Hours and resources at the Cobequid Centre will be enhanced to further reduce ER pressure.

Making more collaborative primary-health-care teams available around the province will reduce unnecessary ER visits and support Nova Scotians as they manage their own health needs.

My government will undertake a new Mental Health Strategy to revamp mental health and addiction services. And the provincial Mental Health Court is already helping to ensure that those who suffer with mental illness are treated with the respect and care they deserve, while ensuring that the justice system is also well served.

Cancer patients will soon receive better care and shorter wait times because of the expansion of radiation therapy services in Halifax and Sydney.

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia already has the only breast screening program in Atlantic Canada with integrated screening and diagnostics. This spring, my government will add five new digital mammography machines to support the growth of this important prevention program.

The province is taking important steps to reduce the burden on those who rely on health care the most—senior citizens.

By April 2011, another 360 new long-term-care beds will be open around the province. We will also support seniors with chronic conditions by introducing more nurse practitioners into nursing homes.

My government understands that a better health care system means finding new, more efficient ways to deliver health care. That is precisely what it is doing.

According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Nova Scotia spends 6.3 per cent of its total health care costs on administration, compared to a national average of 5.3 per cent. My government will work to close this gap and will reallocate spending to support front-line and primary health care.

My government will increase accountability and transparency in setting priorities for major health capital projects. A new Drug Information System will be developed to enhance patient safety and monitor drug use to make sure health dollars are being used wisely.

As part of a move toward better care, just months ago, Nova Scotia launched the first system in Canada that gives paramedics traveling in ambulances access to potentially life-saving information about patient allergies, medical conditions, and medication.

Pharmacists can now help people refill their medication even if they can't reach their doctor. As well, you will soon be asked to consider legislation that will further expand their scope of practice to include administering vaccines by injection, among other changes.

Thanks to Healthlink 811, the province's new 24/7 telecare service, an ill person in Canso, or a worried parent in Kentville, can phone an experienced registered nurse who can provide health advice on the spot.

This service proved its worth when 811 nurses handled up to 1800 calls a day during the H1N1 crisis.

Caregivers play a vital role in helping their loved ones. In consultation with stakeholders, my government will change the existing Caregiver Allowance Program to improve support and benefits for caregivers.

Patterns are set for life in childhood. Improving the health and well-being of our children is a great investment. Government will do that through a childhood obesity strategy and continued focus on promoting active, healthy living for all families.

This government is committed to better health care for you and your family.

Creating good jobs and growing the economy

Everyone everywhere knows that this is a time of global economic anxiety. Nova Scotia must also overcome its own distinct challenges.

The challenges we have inherited are difficult. Nova Scotia had the worst economic growth of any province in the region during the past two decades.

Without a vibrant economy, a province stagnates. Its young people leave. Its future dims.

My government envisions a different future. And Nova Scotia's revival is now underway.

The province's prosperity requires increased productivity. We need to continue to create good jobs. We need to take back control of our economic future.

When Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Ltd. went looking for a place to produce towers and blades for wind turbines, it could have gone anywhere in the world.

But it chose the town of Trenton, because Nova Scotia's infrastructure, ingenuity, work ethic, and spirit of partnership are as good as, or better than, any in the world.

When Lockheed Martin went looking for somewhere to build a new training and testing facility for its naval technology, it too could have gone anywhere in the world.

But it chose Dartmouth, because of our seasoned defence-industry workforce and enviable business environment.

In both cases, my government's investments are based on the confidence all Nova Scotians have in our collective abilities. Nova Scotia is poised to be a world leader in renewable energy and defence. Strategic investments will ensure that this province lives up to its immense potential.

NewPage Port Hawkesbury Corporation is a perfect example of a smart, strategic company employing more than 500 people in Cape Breton. Such enterprises are the true engine of job creation. My government will keep working in partnership to capitalize on Nova Scotia's strengths and create more sustainable jobs.

Nova Scotia, together with federal and municipal governments, has committed almost $230 million to over 100 road, water, and other infrastructure projects.

Those jobs will stretch from Cape Breton to Yarmouth. At the same time, my government's five-year plan to pave provincial roads will also get Nova Scotians back to work.

Creating secure jobs is a good investment. That's why last year the province guaranteed a $20-million loan to the Halifax shipyard so that it could build nine patrol frigates, bringing jobs and other economic spin-offs to our province.

Again, my government is showing leadership. Being pro-active is how a government controls its destiny and ensures that prosperity is shared by everyone.

Its decision to raise the Equity Tax Credit will free up over $1 million in new incentives to support investments in Nova Scotian enterprises in the next year.

By providing incentives to businesses, the new Manufacturing and Processing Investment Credit is boosting innovation and productivity in the province's manufacturing and processing sectors, particularly in rural Nova Scotia.

My government is working to complete the Broadband for Rural Nova Scotia Initiative, making this province one of the most connected jurisdictions in North America.

Tourism has always been a winner for our province, generating $1.3 billion in economic activity last year. My government will build on its work with communities, businesses, and individuals to develop and promote tourism and niche travel experiences with a particular emphasis on Southwest Nova. Our booming cultural industry will continue to shine a spotlight on this province nationally and internationally.

The construction industry is front-and-centre in our effort to maintain and create jobs.

My government's New Home Construction Rebate spurred the construction and purchase of 1,500 new homes.

As a trading province, Nova Scotia has always grasped the big picture. The success of export-oriented companies like Oxford Frozen Foods, Michelin, and Clearwater Seafoods shows that connecting with markets far away creates good jobs at home.

In today's global economy, the only way to compete and win is to aggressively search for opportunities.

The province's efforts to build relationships and increase trade with the Caribbean, the European Union, and the United States are paying off, with Vietnam and India emerging as other potential areas of opportunity.

Being a strategic gateway into the United States and a critical link to the global transportation system offers immense economic advantage for Nova Scotia.

NOVA SCOTIA

Through our new Gateway Secretariat, Nova Scotia will play a leadership role in forging an aggressive Gateway marketing and business development strategy focused on North America and Asia.

It also reflects a new reality of the world economy: when our region or country prospers, so does our province.

This is why Nova Scotia will keep working in partnership with other provinces and the federal government to pursue common, mutually beneficial economic opportunities.

One thing that is certain about Nova Scotia's future is that our traditional industries need to remain strong and competitive if this province is going to succeed.

My government is acting right now to make that happen.

The province's "buy local" campaigns are boosting sales of Nova Scotia produce, wine, fish, and value-added products.

Later this year my government will release a ten-year strategy designed to help Nova Scotia's farmers develop new opportunities, manage risk, and become more environmentally sustainable.

We are just as committed to rebuilding a strong fishery. My government will continue to help this important industry by developing and promoting the harvesting, storage, shipping, and processing techniques needed to ensure success.

A new aquaculture strategy, due later this year, will help this sector build upon its world-class strategic advantages.

By the end of 2010, our new approach for managing our forests, minerals, and parklands will be in place. That will usher in a new era in our province's stewardship of its abundant natural assets.

In the coming months my government will release a water management strategy, which was developed through extensive consultation.

My government is also working to achieve the goals of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act. Significant progress has recently been made. Changes to the building code will improve

energy efficiency in new construction, and approaches to redeveloping contaminated sites are under consideration.

My government understands that the status quo has to change if we are to reduce our dependence upon coal and oil and the damage it does to the environment. Natural gas sitting off and on our shores is a logical place to begin the change that is required.

Developing this cleaner-burning resource also means good jobs and royalties that help pay for our schools, hospitals, and roads. But we also need to burn less carbon.

Last year Nova Scotia became the only province in Canada to place hard caps on greenhouse gas emissions in the electricity sector—an initiative that won us awards at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen.

Reaching this goal is not easy for a province that gets nearly 85 per cent of its electricity from coal and oil.

But innovation is the road to progress.

By the end of 2010 Nova Scotia will generate enough wind power to turn the lights on in the equivalent of 80,000 homes—a 400 per cent increase from a year ago.

This spring we will release a plan that will show how we will meet our commitment for 25 per cent renewable electricity by 2015.

And early next year, Nova Scotia will become one of two spots in the world moving forward with clear plans for commercial tidal production—we are determined to seize the opportunities afforded by our natural resources.

Our province is home to the highest tides in the world, and we intend to ensure that we create an energy supply and build the foundations of an industry that will become known the world over as the "Fundy" standard.

Once Nova Scotia was known for shipbuilding, coal, and steel. Now, clean energy could be Nova Scotia's next big industry.

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia's ambitions in the area of clean energy are world class.

That's why my government invested $60 million with Daewoo to create green jobs and help stimulate the province's wind power industry.

And why it is intensifying efforts to pursue new sustainable energy opportunities wherever they arise.

Approximately $300 million will be invested in Nova Scotia through programs for energy efficiency and energy conservation over the next four years. This represents significant opportunities in the green economy.

Because only a government that knows where it is going can lay a foundation for the future of a province.

Good ideas and ambition are not always enough. We must also deal with a looming labour shortage. Nova Scotia is the first province in Canada to have more seniors than youth. Soon more people will be leaving the labour force than entering it.

That simply cannot be allowed to happen. We need skilled workers. We need healthy and safe workplaces. We need innovative thinking.

Past governments did not see this coming. Or they thought the workforce problem would somehow take care of itself.

My government promised that education and training would be its answer to the impending workforce shortage. It is keeping that promise.

High school students are gaining more hands-on work experience through co-op programs and job placements.

The province's new cutting-edge Skilled Trades Centres are drawing more young Nova Scotians into the trades.

Last year the province distributed grants to public school boards to promote skilled trades and trades-related training throughout the province.

My government will continue to work with the Mi'kmaw community to attract aboriginal Nova Scotians into the trades.

Along with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, regional school boards, and the Nova Scotia Community College, the province has also launched a three-year program designed to attract youth to the construction industry.

This year my government will invest another $2 million in the Nova Scotia Community College to make room for 250 more students.

Over the next two fiscal years, the province will contribute $31.5 million to support infrastructure projects at our universities and the Nova Scotia Community College approved under the federal Knowledge Infrastructure Program.

This provincial funding is leveraging $56.7 million from the federal government and $42.3 million from other sources to enable a total of $130.5 million in infrastructure projects.

It is also working with the province's community colleges and world-class universities to ensure that their programming reflects the realities of today's workforce and economy.

My government will also provide support to current and older workers. The new Recognition of Prior Learning pilot initiative will help ensure that no one should have to spend time, energy, and resources learning over again what they already know and can do.

Last year my government delivered over 150 workplace education programs to 1,575 Nova Scotians because we know that people with jobs also need to keep current with the changing needs of the workplace.

Its newly launched Adult Learning and Link Continuing Care Assistant Programs help adult learners gain the literacy, skills-training, and practical work experience they need to enter the work force.

The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers—jointly run by the province and the federal government—smoothes the way for age advantaged workers to re-enter the workforce.

When workers are displaced by a closure or downsizing, my government is there with support services to help people to find new jobs or enter education and training programs.

To ensure that our best and brightest stay at home, the province is providing a tax rebate of up to $15,000 over six years to university graduates and up to $7,500 to college graduates who stay and work in Nova Scotia.

Through the Labour Market Agreement, my government will continue to invest in employment support programs to help under-represented groups find work.

And let us not forget about the province's new immigration strategy, to be launched later this year. It will champion welcoming communities that are inclusive and supportive of newcomers. But the strategy will also try to match skilled international immigrants with the needs of Nova Scotia's employers.

Making life more affordable

A strong economy is one of the pillars of a strong community, as is affordability.

All Nova Scotians should have the opportunity to be part of and contribute to their communities.

My government will transform the Employment Support Income Assistance program to increase economic independence and enhance social inclusion. The program will be client-focused, and will give lasting support instead of being a last resort.

This new philosophy will transform the program into one that achieves positive outcomes for clients and their children, to the benefit of all.

My government is continuing with year two of the province's housing stimulus plan, spending $128 million to build affordable housing units and to upgrade existing ones across the province.

To make life more affordable for families, my government has also taken the provincial portion of the HST off basic electricity.

Almost 400,000 households are benefiting from the rebate.

In addition to increasing long-term-care beds, my government will continue to make life better for seniors by funding a host of programs that provide recreational opportunities for older Nova Scotians while also making their lives safer, more comfortable, and more accessible.

My government kept its pledge to eliminate security deposits charged to seniors in nursing homes.

In this session, my government will introduce legislation to provide fairer treatment of people injured in an auto accident, while keeping insurance premiums affordable.

Some of the most vulnerable in our society make their homes in residential care settings and community-based small options homes. During this sitting of the legislature, my government will introduce amendments to give the Minister of Community Services more effective oversight, in the rare cases where it is needed, over the management of these centres, in response to troubling cases of abuse and mistreatment. To further ensure the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable citizens, all small options homes will be licensed.

This desire to reduce the burden on families is rooted in the core values of my government. It is our responsibility to make life better for Nova Scotian families.

Just as it is our duty to ensure the sound stewardship of taxpayer's money.

Getting back to balance and ensuring government lives within its means

In 2009 my government ended the most outrageous MLA allowances, including the public purchase of private MLA assets.

The Auditor General then reported how excessive MLA expense allowances had been provided with little or no guidance to protect the public interest. It is time for change, and a complete break with the discredited expense system.

Very soon my government will introduce new House of Assembly Management legislation, to establish a new, open, and accountable system, with clear guidelines for appropriate constituency expenses. It will require that expenses be posted online and will eliminate non-receiptable allowances.

One thing is absolutely clear: the new system will ensure that taxpayer's money is not wasted.

It will also enable the government to face its most pressing challenge: getting back to balance and living within its means.

To determine the province's true fiscal situation, my government conducted a review of the province's finances and appointed an Economic Advisory Panel to make recommendations on how to proceed.

Both reports confirmed that only tough decisions will restore the province to a solid fiscal standing.

Yet balancing the budget in the coming fiscal year would do serious harm to Nova Scotia's economy and destabilize public services.

It would hurt people, rather than make their lives better.

So we will balance the budget, as we promised, because the province's future depends upon it. But it will not happen this year.

The upcoming budget will outline in detail our multi-year fiscal strategy to help government manage the province's finances and get Nova Scotia back to balance.

Already underway is a multi-year plan to sharpen the effectiveness and efficiency of every government department, while still ensuring that Nova Scotian families get the services and support they need.

For my government, above all else, will never leave people behind.

Forty years ago bulldozers razed the last building in the community of Africville, leaving a hole in the heart of the generations of African Nova Scotians who made their homes there.

But healing must start somewhere. And, so, my government will contribute $1.5 million over three years to help build a church and interpretive centre on the former Africville site.

The province is extending French language supports for Acadians and francophones.

My government is reaching out to at-risk youth through its promised after-school Lighthouses Program, which offers young people recreational, social, and educational opportunities that can make a difference in their lives.

My government is also keeping its commitment to increase funding for transition houses and women's centres.

Even while facing difficult financial challenges, my government is working hard to keep its commitments to Nova Scotians and achieve much needed change.

It values the views and contributions of people from all walks of life, from the urban centres to the distant rural roads.

This government is ready to make the right decisions and enable a better life for Nova Scotia families.

My government will take on the difficult challenges the province faces while seizing the opportunities provided by Nova Scotians' talent, drive, ambition, and optimism.

God bless Nova Scotia.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

NOVA SCOTIA

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